

**Opening Statement of Senator Herb Kohl
Special Committee on Aging Hearing
Seniors at Risk: Improving Medicare for Our Most Vulnerable
May 22, 2008**

Good morning. Today Ranking Member Smith wields the gavel for this hearing on the Medicare low-income subsidy.

In January of last year, I held my first hearing as Chairman on this very topic. The low-income subsidy was a major selling point when the Medicare Prescription Drug law was passed in 2003, and was often cited as the reason that some members and organizations threw their support behind it. Unfortunately, we're now in the third year of the program and low-income seniors are facing many of the same challenges as last year and the year before.

We will hear today once again that the current asset test for the subsidy bars far too many low-income seniors from the program. We also know that the initial application process and the requirement that seniors reapply each year is cumbersome and requires some commonsense changes. Finally, I will note that federal agencies should be working together and sharing information in order to allow for greater outreach to seniors who qualify for the low-income subsidy. These are our most vulnerable citizens, in great need of health care assistance, and the program does not do them any good if they are not a part of it.

I sincerely appreciate all the work Senator Smith has done on this issue. I am proud to be a cosponsor of two pieces of legislation that he and Senator Jeff Bingaman have introduced on the subject, which address many of the challenges I've just mentioned. Senator Smith, thank you once again for holding this important hearing.